

Unplanned Parenthood: The Socio-Economic Consequences of Adolescent Child-bearing in Nigeria

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Abstract

Adolescent girls feel that adolescent years are a period of breaking away from parents and authority and of finding personal values and particular social and vocational roles. It is an exciting period but possibly a time of experimentation and discovery, discovering people in a relationship and for the first time expressing that relationship sexually. Unfortunately, adolescent girls in the society today are ill-equipped with knowledge about the functions of their body chemistry. Although, in the African culture a girl is brought up and socialized in preparation for motherhood, it is a major component of the feminine gender roles as taught to a female child by the parents and others with whom she comes into contact. Though the assertion that “all women need to be mothers” comes to be true, but some adolescent become parents at the wrong time, thereby complicating matters and the implications are very enormous. This paper examines the socio-Economic consequences of adolescent child bearing. In the paper, it is observed that unplanned parenthood has a long time adverse socio-economic impact on the adolescent mothers and it is capable of truncating their future. It is however recommended that adolescent girls should Endeavour to complete their education, learn new functional skills, gain some work experience and designs a future for themselves before starting a family.

Keywords: Unplanned parenthood, socio-economic consequences ,Adolescent, Childbearing ,Nigeria.

Introduction

Adolescent parenthood is described as underage girl (usually within the ages of 13-21) becoming pregnant or already raising a child or children, the term in everyday speech usually refers to women who have not reached adulthood which varies across the world, who become pregnant or already a parent (National Research Center for Women and Families, 2001).

The gradual movements from childhood to adulthood create many changes in adolescents, such as physical, emotional and moral changes. Factors which predispose adolescents for pre-marital sex are early initiations of sexual activities, an early onset of menstruation among females, lack of counseling and the breakdown of traditional moral values.

Most adolescent girls find it difficult to see the future, this is one of the causes of pregnancy and motherhood in the first place and to girls whom everything seems bleak in terms of interest, the life of motherhood may then seem attractive to them as a way of gaining and social status . despite this misconception it is however noted that an adolescent who delays child bearing till the right time enjoys the joys of motherhood, she has more opportunities to acquire education and skills that will enable her to better care for her family and compete more successfully in labor market than if she had taken on the responsibilities of motherhood during adolescence.

The majority of adolescent pregnancies that result to parenthood in Nigeria today, are unplanned and unwanted. Thus, the psychological, social and physical immaturity on the part of the adolescent parents' leaves much to be desired.

Therefore, it is no surprise that such unplanned parenthood frequently create considerable psychological and physical anguish, serious socio-economic consequences, and even mental health risks that are often ignored or misunderstood.

The Socio-Economic Consequences of Adolescent Motherhood

Most women who have children very young have limited education, limited job opportunities and limited choices for the future and a high degree of dependency (Population Reports 1995). For a young girl in secondary school, with unwanted pregnancy can be catastrophe, they leave school almost always (Population Reports 1995). Furthermore, such pregnancy almost always means the end of formal schooling or training and restriction to future opportunities to improve her status. It is still difficult in societies for the young mother who was forced out of school by pregnancy to return to school. Both school and community will not openly allow it for fear that the young mother will become a bad influence in school. If she manages to get back to school, she may have to put up with a lot of ridicule from her colleagues (Odu & Ayodele 2007).

The Population Reports (1995) asserts further that young woman who begin child bearing early complete less schooling than women who delay childbearing until their twenties. Also school girls who became pregnant rarely return to school, after giving birth because they must care for the child.

Notwithstanding, improving girls' education is a further indication of the growing recognition that early childbearing can have negative social and economic consequences including the attainment of education for young

mothers. (Strasburger, 1989). The international community and most governments now view adolescent child bearing as having negative consequences, and increasingly parents and adolescents themselves share this view (Sharpe, 1996 McGuire 1983).

However, early childbearing curtails the number of years spent in formal education or in learning vocational skills. It also has a negative impact on socioeconomic standing of adolescents and perpetuates poverty from one generation to another. Moore and Burt (1982) conducted a survey which was used to trace the social and economic consequences of adolescent childbearing and the results indicates that early birth affects the amount of schooling a young woman is able to complete even when family background and motivation are considered.

It has been discovered that a girl who becomes pregnant is expected to assume a role based solely on care for her, baby which presumes she will not be attending school. Furthermore, pregnant girls are frequently expelled from school and are usually strongly discourage from continuing with their education (Adolescent Women in Sub-Sahara African 1998). Early child bearing can have negative social consequences. Young girls of poor financial background do suffer neglect as their basic needs of life are not met (Odu and Ayodele, 2006).

Motherhood affects adolescent's education to an extent because for the individual adolescent mother, it means leaving without obtaining the minimum educational requirements actually needed for entering into labour market. Furthermore, having the child means she is barred from returning to school and if this happens she is denied further opportunities and often also in vocational training at a period in her life.

According to Kiernan (1998) the educational status of adolescent mothers and their parents are found to be low, also they are found to be least ambitious about careers and to be in manual or semi-skilled jobs.

Most adolescent mothers hardly complete their education and furthermore, Cross and Smith (1987) support the view that adolescent mothers typically have lower educational attainment than other women. Due to the fact that adolescent mothers have low educational ability, Metson (1988) believes that educational failure is a mechanism through which daughters of adolescent mothers become pregnant themselves.

One should at this point fail not to mention the indisputable fact that Petchetsky (1984) mentions which is that adolescent motherhood usually ends the mother's education as well as her chances of ever-getting a good job. To buttress this point young mothers have next to no opportunity for employment, training or completing their education while no facilities exist to look after their children. Mothers in such circumstances are very poorly supported and often become severely depressed (Ajomale 2003).

If eventually such adolescent mothers return to the classrooms, it is discovered by Birch (1987) that a considerable proportion of mothers aged sixteen years and under was considered by their teachers to be below average ability and also felt them to be failures and is so truanted regularly at school.

Adolescent motherhood is therefore strongly associated with school dropout and many girls still of school age lower their educational targets in preparing for motherhood and once it happens, they assume if they go back to school they will not do as well as they might want to. It is seen as disadvantageous for a young woman and for society as a whole because education has become increasingly important to improving one's life but a woman who delays the birth of her first child until after her adolescent years may be able to significantly enhance her child's welfare as well as also having a more direct role in determining the course of her own life (Odu and Ayodele, 2007).

Feyisetan and Pabley (1989) argue that girls who become pregnant during their statutory school years and decide to keep the baby are, generally speaking, making one statement about disliking school and another about their own needs in terms of self-value. Parents are not always able to offer appropriate help, and do what to do for the best. A significant factor of growing up, which the pregnant or parenting school student is likely to miss out is an education which her child(ren) in economic, emotional, intellectual and creative terms. Unless enlightened policy-makers provide suitable and congenial facilities for her continuing education as well as for the minding of her child while she does so, early pregnancy very often means a blunted education.

Wilson (1978) in his study found out that it is evidenced that girls who becomes young adolescent mothers have a long standing difficulties, they are academic under achievers, performing less well in arithmetic and English than their measured intelligence would suggest.

There seems to be a considerable pressure put on pregnant school girl's and school age mothers to remain in or return to High school in order to get their education without which they have very few chances of employment. The financial hardship and all the aspects of poverty that this brings with it has brought the

Problem of adolescent motherhood to the forefront of social policy in Nigeria recently

Along with other categories of disaffected school children many school age mothers and mothers to be manage to avoid their months and sometimes years of schooling due to many factors. This include difficulties in parental control and the overloaded education welfare terms maintains some groups below the poverty level, provides disincentives to independent status, and ignores large categories of poor and needy. As a result, many teenagers find themselves in a vicious cycle were in the problems of poverty compound the chances of adolescent pregnancy and adolescent pregnancy compounds the problems of poverty.

In many countries today particularly in the Sub-Sahara African one in five adolescents start life as a adolescent mother, and this has a significant impact on health care, education, child welfare and other public systems such as housing.

From deprivations engendered by reliance on state services for basic requirements there arise social, economic and psychological problems which are almost impossible to eradicate, since they begin at the cradle and are absorbed as a way of multiple difficulties and needs are a burden on state systems like health and housing. While realizing this and attempting to control and economize, the respective governments fails to see that such action amounts basically to shutting the door after the horse has bolted.

McGee (1982) critically reviewed that young mothers are not satisfied with the appropriateness of the help provided, nor that help is provided where, when or for as long as it is needed and for this reason some become resigned and passive towards their future. Longitudinal study in Britain and United State suggest that the pattern of relative poverty persists both during the child's early years (Osborn Butler, Moris 1984) and for considerably longer (Furstemberger 1996). Without good employment prospect, there is no route out of poverty.

Campbell 1998 in her book about poverty and politics describes the life of young single mothers as well below her and society's expectations. According to Sander (1984) adolescent girls who become mothers suffer financial consequences to school dropout and thus not financially equipped to provide adequately for their children, adolescent parenthood affects them economically and socially.

Consequently, Keenan (2003) says adolescent motherhood is likely to have a devastating effect on the mother's future. It is however said that sometimes according to Phoenix 1999 adolescent mothers are dependent on welfare subsidy and it automatically leads to poverty and low self concept. The financial strain of cope with the stress of raising a child without the support of the family.

It is worthy of note that young women who give birth before marriage may be disowned by their families and left with the responsibility of raising the child by themselves. According to the Alan Gutmacher Institute 2004 in some settings, unmarried pregnant adolescent may believe they have no life, also adolescent who give birth before marriage may be disowned by their family.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (1999) equally asserts that adolescent mothers are still working out their own place in the world and a baby at that time, adds to the emotional' burden especially if the mother is on her own.

Furthermore, the daughters of adolescent mothers are also more likely to become adolescent mother's themselves.

According to Kieman (1980) there has been a long debate over the economy and social effects of bearing a child as an adolescent. It cripples the mother's prospects for economic well being in the years ahead. Furthermore, Ajomale & Sawyer 2003) submit that adolescent mothers and their children face an uncertain economic future.

Wilson (1980), in his own research critically examines and concludes that adolescent pregnancy has long time adverse socio economic consequences for the mother. Coyne and Boulton (2009) also describes the social consequences of adolescent's pregnancy to include school dropout or interrupted education, vulnerability to their participation in criminal activity, abortion, social ostracism, child neglects, abandonment and school adjustment problems for children born to adolescent mothers, adoption and lack of social security.

It is alarming according to Ogbu (1995) that women whose mothers gave birth to them as adolescent are twice as likely as daughters of older mothers to begin their own childbearing early, it is view of this that he goes further to say that adolescent mothers are likely to live in poverty and have fewer job possibilities and lower income. The economic consequences of early motherhood often are more extreme because they will need wage paying jobs, which is lacking. Also adolescent mothers face a number of negative 'social consequences as a result of their pregnancies.

Population Report Publication (1995) recorded that young mothers often are poor because they are not married and also have no husband to help support the family.

Buller (1996) in her study also shows that adolescent motherhood is associated with adverse socio-economic conditions and poor earning opportunities for the adolescent mother. In an attempt to emphasize the severity of the social and economic consequences of adolescent child bearing, the level of schooling a young woman achieves is likely to be lowered and so she is likely to depend on her family for support if they accept her and the baby. (Bury 1984). She is also likely have the opportunity to develop her own identity since she has her family there for her.

Odu and Ayodele (2007) in their research find out that early child bearing is associated with parental marital status, where parents live peacefully together, they are able to train and cater for their children, even monitor them and give them sound moral instructions to prevent them from waywardness.

Indeed, association between negative. social economic and health consequences of early childbearing are strong, research findings ever support the fact that social and economic disadvantages account for a good part of the consequences.

Furthermore, births to unmarried adolescent are often unplanned or unwanted and most young single mother are in a precarious economic position (Sander 1984). Equally important, lack of job opportunities and desire to become a mother cause early childbearing to occur even where secondary education is considered desirable for young people of both sexes (Corby, 1987).

Conclusion and recommendations.

The emotional and financial strains of motherhood are grave for an adolescent who has a birth out of wedlock. She has no alternative but to come with the stress of raising a child without the support of the father. A young woman is therefore, expected to complete her education and gain some work experience before starting a family life, therefore it is believed that having a child outside wedlock during adolescence is a social menace and therefore condemned strongly by the society.

In the final analysis, it is worthy of note that health, emotional, social and economic stresses are evidence of consequences of adolescent motherhood. It is however of concern that many adolescents have not succeeded in taking control of their lives, learning new functional skills and designing a future for themselves before becoming parents.

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